

## FEDERAL AGENCY LIVABLE COMMUNITIES PROJECT

### WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER WATERSHED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION OF AN URBAN RIVER

Goal: Woonasquatucket American Heritage River to serve as a model of success for the Smart Growth/Federal Livability Agenda

Opportunity: Target projects within the Woonasquatucket Watershed, with a focus of the urban areas, that can achieve real, tangible improvements for the six communities.

Ongoing: Partnerships among communities, interest groups and state and federal agencies have formed as a result of the designation of the Woonasquatucket as an American Heritage River (with the Blackstone), as one of 2 priority watersheds selected by Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, and as the model of Urban River work in Providence under the Urban Rivers Team. This momentum is critical to moving the partnerships and projects from planning to action.

How?: The American Heritage River designation enables communities in partnership with state and federal agencies to look at environmental restoration, economic redevelopment, historical, cultural and recreational issues. The benefit of the Federal Joint Partnership on Smart Growth is a directed effort toward some of those components related to communities addressing concerns about economic sustainability, sprawl and open space protection.

This watershed has multiple challenges but in a manageable scale. The river itself is 18 miles and connects 6 communities-from Providence through North Providence to Smithfield, North Smithfield, Johnston and Glocester.

The Federal Partnership can build on existing collaborations (Brownfields showcase, Greenway project for example) and focus on other opportunities within the watershed. From a meeting on 10/4 with North Providence, local officials identified the location/relocation of the post office within the Centredale area as key for economic revitalization.

Potential Role of the Federal Partners: The action plan of projects identified by the Woonasquatucket watershed communities will be ready in December. This list will be prioritized by a Steering Committee of community members and will highlight specific needs and achievable projects. With your support and partnership, we can turn these projects into reality for the communities.

The MOU was designed to “support concerted, cooperative and collaborative smart growth.’ The Woonasquatucket River watershed is ready and prepared to engage in innovative and smart ways to encourage economic growth, environmental restoration and cultural preservation.

Woonasquatucket River  
American Heritage River Steering Committee  
56 Pine Street, Suite 3B  
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May 9, 2000

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Robert Dunfey  
Regional Administrator, General Services Administration  
New England Area  
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Dear Ms. Lubber and Mr. Dunfey:

Thank you for your participation in the Livable Communities program for the Woonasquatucket Watershed. The six river communities represent a diverse set of consultants from an urban setting to a more rural location. The cultural diversity of the current population offers a significant asset to this watershed. We greatly appreciate you and the other federal agencies' interest in uniting expertise and resources to address some of the concerns raised by the communities.

To date, we have sponsored meetings with four of our watershed communities bringing them together with representatives from several of the participating agencies. Each session highlighted issues and concerns of importance to the municipalities and offered opportunities for collaboration between the federal agencies and the communities. We are submitting a list that encompasses the opportunities for collaboration as discussed in those meetings. The list is a partial list, as we are still in the planning stages for our meetings with the towns of Glocester and Johnston. These meetings will mirror our past site visits. We will arrange the meetings in the community and invite our federal partners to listen to the local issues and visit the sites, and present information about federal programs and opportunities relating to the Livable Community designation.

We have already made some progress in the Watershed with the help of many of the federal agencies. Our designations as an American Heritage River, a Brownfields Showcase Community and an Enterprise Community (the latter two applying to Providence) have brought recognition and support in key areas. However, as many of you saw first hand in your meetings in the watershed, we have much work left to do. These designations reflect agency awareness of the needs as well as the potential inherent in this watershed. We appreciate the potential support offered within each of these programs and look forward to our new partnerships under the

Livable Community initiative.

We are pleased to present to you the following list of opportunities for the federal agencies involved in the Livable Communities Working Group to provide assistance to the Woonasquatucket River Watershed.

#### Environmental Protection Agency

- (1) Operating support to provide for capacity needs of Woonasquatucket American Heritage River Steering Committee.
- (2) Assistance to identify ways to match up federal and state programs to protect land currently under development pressure. For example, in North Smithfield there are at least 2 parcels of primarily farmland at the headwaters of the Woonasquatucket which could be preserved. Smithfield has a new Land Trust leading the effort to preserve land, however, this new organization has extremely limited resources to purchase any of the properties that are in jeopardy of development in key watershed locations.
- (3) Expedite resolution and time frame for Allendale Dam repair/replacement to prevent continued release of contaminated sediments downstream.
- (4) Conduct a survey of non-point sources in industrial corridors along Woonasquatucket watershed.
- (5) Concurrent with the cleanup work ongoing at the Centredale Superfund site, build a pedestrian bridge and walkway from Centredale manor to enable residents (primarily elderly) direct access to the new Post Office square in North Providence.
- (6) Provide technical assistance and/or enforcement actions for specific industries of concern within the watershed: a) auto salvage yards and b) construction industries (e.g. asphalt companies).

#### Department of Transportation

- (1) Complete the remediation of the Riverside Mills Brownfields site with additional cleanup funds to facilitate bike path construction.
- (2) Provide funds for improvements to the street corridor connecting Olneyville Square with the Woonasquatucket River Greenway and bikeway. Manton Ave and along Aleppo Street are the targeted locations. This project will augment the TCSP project for Olneyville by linking the residential areas of Olneyville to the square.
- (3) Evaluate and implement structural improvements to the retaining wall on Aleppo Street to sustain one lane road along Aleppo Street.
- (4) Relocate the bus stop in North Providence to provide for safer and easier local resident access to public transportation.

(5) Coordinate with RIDOT to ensure that Phase II Stormwater guidelines are implemented in a timely fashion within the Woonasquatucket watershed.

#### US Postal Service

(1) Site new post office in designated location closer to the Woonasquatucket River to serve as the anchor of a new retail square adjacent to the Centredale Manor Superfund site. New location should be state-of-the art for storm water mitigation and also provide for a new bus turnaround in North Providence.

(2) Eliminate chain link and barbed wire fencing on the banks of the Woonasquatucket on Hartford Avenue site in Providence. Additionally, remove some of the pavement to reduce storm water runoff on the property. Pursue options to form a positive partnership for reopening the pedestrian bridge with adjacent land owner to allow locals access to grocery store.

#### National Park Service

(1) Establish a Woonasquatucket Heritage Trail with site and building markers and educational kiosks to bring awareness of the natural, historical and cultural resources within the watershed. The trail would connect the diverse elements of the watershed and link rural and urban communities and neighborhoods to each other. The watershed includes historic buildings from 1680's to the present representing the rich cultural heritage of the river and its people. Currently, there are few site markers beyond the displays in downtown Providence as part of Waterplace Park.

(2) The Woonasquatucket watershed communities are collecting information for an asset map and watershed report. NPS could provide assistance in further identification of historic sites buildings and cultural locations, design layout and assist with the copy writing of the reports.

#### General Services Administration

(1) Several of the Woonasquatucket watershed communities need computers and printers to effectively access GIS information for planning and environmental protection activities. Additionally, some even do not have basic equipment (e.g. fax machine) to stay current with projects. We need to identify sources of equipment to facilitate their access to regional information. Our goal would be to create a system that could link these six watershed communities to the statewide system and provide them with the technological resources they need to effectively manage their resources. This work could be coordinated with RIDEM work with GIS and RIGIS.

#### Department of Energy

(1) Coordinate with state energy office to provide notice of grant cycles for renewable energy planning grants for mill restoration or other similar projects. For example, when ownership of

Greystone Mill in North Providence is resolved (currently in receivership), we would like to have options in place for the owner and/or municipality to receive funds to plan for energy efficient renovations. Time frame most likely in end of 2000 or 2001.

(2) Provide an informational forum for the six communities in the watershed about federal energy programs and specific information on assistance available for the economic revitalization of historic facilities.

(3) Conduct an energy study for potential reuse options at the riverside Mills building in Providence. The building has been abandoned since a fire in 1989, and is currently undergoing a structural analysis.

(4) Conduct a survey of abandoned buildings or poorly used facilities within the watershed for potential energy reuse opportunities.

### Housing and Urban Development

U.S. Senator Jack Reed and Providence Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr. announced on April 9 that the U.S. Department of Housing and urban Development (HUD) will award \$1,000,000 in funding through HUD's Neighborhood Initiative Program to the City of Providence for the Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project for proposed Brownfields remediation at the Riverside Mills site in Olneyville. The funding will enable work to get underway for a 4.4 mile Greenway from Waterplace Park in downtown Providence to the Johnstown town line. The bikepath will ultimately link four parks-Waterplace Park, Donigian Park, Merino Park and Button Hole Golf Course with their neighborhoods. As soon as remediation is complete, construction of the bikeway and Greenway can begin. City and community partners, such as The Providence Plan, the leading organization for the Woonasquatucket as an American Heritage River, are hopeful that final work on the Greenway could begin as early as this fall and no later than spring 2001.

(1) Expedite promised assistance for the remediation of the Riverside Mills Brownfields site.

(2) Work with local groups such as the Olneyville Housing Corporation and RIEDC to identify opportunities to develop affordable housing near Riverside Mills and promote mixed used development in this area.

### USDA

(1) We need assistance to find programs to protect vulnerable farmlands. Glocester, North Smithfield, Smithfield, and perhaps Johnston have farms and other undeveloped tracts facing development pressures. Could USDA conduct a survey of all existing farmland and identify programs (federal and state) that could be accessed to maintain this heritage?

Finally, we have not identified a specific task which corresponds with Army Corps of Engineers programs, but ask that they continue to remain as an active participant with the goal of their more direct involvement in livable projects in the future. We look forward to discussing our

partnership opportunities with you. Thank you for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Jane B. Sherman  
Chair, Woonasquatucket River  
American Heritage River Steering Committee

Cc: Senator Jack Reed  
Senator Lincoln Chafee  
Governor Lincoln Almond  
Congressman Patrick Kennedy  
Congressman Robert Weygand  
Members of the American Heritage Rivers Steering Committee  
Carl Dierker, EPA  
Jim Devir, GSA